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ABSTRACT

There is a necessary connection between civics and economics in education for democracy. This connection should be reflected in school curricula. This digest discusses: (1) federal legislation and programs promoting civics and economics; (2) the connections between civics and economics in the study of the U.S. Constitution; (3) the status of economic education in the schools; and (4) recommendations for strengthening the connection between civics and economics in the school curriculum. (BT)

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The Connection Between Civic and Economic Education

By Margaret Stimmann Branson

There is a necessary connection between civics and economics in education for democracy. This connection should be reflected in the curricula in schools. This Digest discusses (1) federal legislation and programs promoting civics and economics, (2) the connections between civics and economics in the study of the Constitution, (3) the status of economic education in the schools, and (4) recommendations for strengthening the connection between civics and economics in the school curriculum.

Federal Legislation and Programs in Support of Civics and Economics in the Core Curriculum of Schools. Two pieces of recent legislation by the United States Congress have spurred the study of civics and economics: "The Goals 2000: Educate America Act," passed in 1994, and the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001."

One of the most important goals set forth in the Educate America Act is that "all students will leave grades 4, 8 and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including ... civics and government ... and economics ... so that they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment."

To specify the nature of that "challenging subject matter," professional organizations have developed content standards. Content standards are explicit statements of what students should know and be able to do by the time they complete grades 4, 8 and 12. Content standards indicate the ways of thinking, working, communicating, reasoning, and investigating and delineate the most important and enduring ideas, concepts, issues, dilemmas, and knowledge essential to the disciplines that should be taught and learned in school.

The *National Standards for Civics and Government* were developed over two years by the Center for Civic Education with support from the federal government and the Pew Charitable Trusts. State-level departments of education have made use of the national civics standards by adopting, adapting, and modifying them to meet their own needs.

The *National Content Standards in Economics* were developed by the National Council on Economic Education in partnership with the National Association of Economic Educators Foundation for Teaching Economics. The *National Content Standards in Economics* specify several kinds of knowledge that students should have gained by the time they finish the twelfth grade, which demonstrate connections between economics and civics/government (1997, xi).

The second significant piece of legislation pertaining to the teaching and learning of civics and economics is Public Law 107-110 enacted by the 107th Congress and signed by President George W. Bush. It is better known by its short title, "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001." The overall purpose of this law is "to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind."

Subpart 3 of the No Child Left Behind Act deals specifically with civic education, but it is attentive to the interrelationship of civic and economic education. Section 2342 of the Act sets forth its legislative intent in this fashion:

> It is the purpose of this subpart ---
>
> (1) to improve the quality of civics and government education by educating students about the history and principles of the Constitution of the United States, including the Bill of Rights;
>
> (2) to foster civic competence and responsibility; and
>
> (3) to improve the quality of civic education and economic education through cooperative civic education and economic education exchange programs with emerging democracies.

Connections Between Civics and Economics in Study of the Constitution. For more than 200 years, Americans have looked to their Constitution and Bill of Rights as the quintessential statements of their nation's values and of their political rights. They are less accustomed to thinking of the U.S. Constitution as an economic document. Even so, economists point out: "Constitutions are economic documents as well as political documents. This is certainly true of the Constitution of the United States. Our nation's founders ... included numerous provisions in the Constitution that support and encourage the operation of a market economy"(Dick, Blais, and Moore 1998, 3).

These four specific economic values embedded in the Constitution should be emphasized in the curricula of schools:

1. Legal protection of the right to private property.
2. Support for private entrepreneurial activity.
3. Support for a large common market among the states inherent in the "commence clause" of Article 1, Section 8.
4. The rule of law, which provides security for order and stability in which economic activity can flourish.

If students are to become "constitutionally literate," then they must understand the interrelated political and economic aspects of the U.S. Constitution.

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The Current Status of Economic Education. Given the necessity of economic literacy for informed, effective, and responsible citizenship, it is appropriate to consider the current status of economic education in the United States. Presently we know that:

- Forty-eight states and the District of Columbia have standards for economics.
- Twenty-two states now test the economic knowledge and skills of students. Economic items, however, are often embedded in more comprehensive social studies assessments. Nine more states are now preparing to test in economics.
- Thirteen states require an economics course for graduation. That course tends to be a one-semester twelfth grade requirement paired with a one-semester course in American government.
- Only 47 percent of high school seniors have taken an economics course before graduation. An additional 10 percent of high school students take courses such as American government and economics, which may include substantial civics as well as economics (National Center for Education Statistics 2001).
- Teacher background in economics is often limited. Only 11 states require economics for teacher certification. The average social studies teacher takes only four hours of economics in college and those are the teachers most likely to teach separate economics courses (Walstad 2001).

A better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of economics education is in the offing. A National Assessment of Educational Progress in Economics (NAEP) is scheduled for 2006. This measure of twelfth graders' knowledge and skills in economics is a first. Never before has there been a national assessment of economics. Preparation of the assessment has been contracted to the National Council on Economic Education, The Council of Chief State School Officers, and the American Institute of Research. Some 10,000 students in 400 public and private schools will be tested and their teachers and school administrators will be interviewed to obtain additional insights into the status of economic education.

Recommendations. There is ample evidence of the importance of both civic and economic literacy on the part of all citizens. Unfortunately, both civics and economics are given insufficient attention today in many, if not most, schools. This situation needs to be corrected. Systematic attention to civics and government and economics needs to occur in every grade from kindergarten through high school. Students should be helped to understand why and how the two disciplines are connected. And the connections between economics and civics need to be emphasized in the preservice education and professional development of social studies teachers.

World Wide Web Sites. The National Council on Economic Education's Web site <ncee.net> includes information about various resources in economic education.

The Web site of the Center for Civic Education features position papers and information about educational resources in civic education: <www.civiced.org/>.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche, paper, or electronic full text from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; World Wide Web <edrs.com>; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

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